

Feb. 13, 2003

Re: Triennial Review of Unbundled Network Elements
WCB Docket No. 01-338, ex parte communication

Dear Commissioners:

As advocates for the people who live in America's small towns and rural counties, we are writing to urge the Commission to preserve UNE-P as a reasonable way to bring consumer choice to the local phone market. We can appreciate that the FCC is under great pressure by the local phone monopolies to adopt rules changes that will eliminate the UNE-P requirements made possible by the Telecom Act of 1996. We're hopeful that the FCC stands firm to preserve a workable form of UNE-P.

Maintaining UNE-P and with it the country's hopes for full telecom competition will be good news for all Americans, but especially those 40 million rural Americans who live in areas where they are not offered broadband services by either the regional Bell companies or the cable TV companies. For these people, the "digital divide" isn't yesterday's issue; it is a very real concern for today and tomorrow.

A fully competitive telecom market is the best way we know to guarantee broadband connections to those who currently have no broadband options. Recent market history has shown that both the Bells and the cable companies will make better offers to consumers when real competition finally takes root. And reasonable sharing of the Bells' publicly subsidized local networks is essential to creating that kind of competition.

Congress had the wisdom to give individual states broad authority for implementing fair access in keeping with their own local market conditions. Like most rural Americans, we feel that each state is the best judge of those conditions and we are optimistic that the FCC will not be inclined to tear away state authority.

The benefits of the Telecom Act have been much too long in coming. Now that they are finally beginning to materialize, we hope the FCC makes sure that those benefits are not snatched away. Rural America applauds your vigilance.

Sincerely,

Pat Buckley
Farm Business Council

Fmr. Senator Malcolm Wallop
Frontiers of Freedom

Dean Kleckner
Former President, American Farm Bureau (1986 - 2000), retired